

# Trinity College Dublin

## Quality Committee

### Draft Minutes

**XX = Council Reference**

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Minutes of the meeting of the Quality Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013 in the Boardroom, House 1.

**Present:** Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, Dean of Health Sciences, Dean of Graduate Studies, Senior Lecturer, Academic Secretary, Professor Ciaran Brady, Professor Simon McGinnes, Professor Catherine Coxon, Professor Sheila Ryder, Ms. Laura Conway-McAuley, Mrs. Jessie Kurtz, Education Officer of the Students' Union, Vice-President Graduate Students' Union.

**In attendance:** Professor James Lunney (Head of School, Physics), Dr Colm Stephens (School Administrator, Physics), Mr. Ian Mathews (Chief Financial Officer), Professor Paul Browne (Interim Head of School, Medicine), Ms Orla Bannon (School Administrator, Medicine), Dr. Liz Donnellan (Secretary to the Committee).

**Apologies:** Chief Operating Officer, Dean of Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics & Science, Professor John Walsh.

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The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer opened the meeting by thanking the Senior Lecturer for chairing the previous meeting of the committee.

**QC/13-14/009 Minutes of the meeting of the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013**

The minutes of the meeting of the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013 were approved.

**QC/13-14/010 Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

**QC/13-14/011 Quality Reviews**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer introduced the item by outlining the newly enhanced role of the Quality Committee in considering the reports arising from Quality Reviews prior to their approval at Council or Board.

**(i) Implementation Plan for the Library**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Deputy Librarian to speak to the Implementation Plan for the Library which had been circulated with papers for the meeting. The Deputy Librarian reported that it had been almost a year since the quality review of the Library had taken place and updated the Committee on the implementation of the Reviewers' recommendations since then.

In relation to the recommendation regarding the Legal Deposit Review, she advised the Committee that consultation with internal and external stakeholders was underway to ascertain the 'qualitative' value of UK Legal Deposit to the College's regional and national reputation and that a draft report would be ready by Spring 2014. With regard to the transfer of Library shop staff from the Academic Services Division to the Corporate Services Division under START, it was reported that the change management process is on-going pending the appointment of the new Director of Commercialisation.

The role of the Librarian and representation for the Library on key Committees is still under consideration in light of the START programme and other organisational changes in College. The review of the research collections division is paused pending the appointment of the new Librarian, and the development of a Physical Master Plan for the Library has commenced. This will be considered in conjunction with the Tourist Master Plan which is currently being developed by the Bursar.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Acting Librarian and confirmed that the Tourist Master Plan will be discussed at the next meeting of the Estates Committee. In response to a question regarding mechanisms for ensuring two-way communication between the Library and its users, the Acting Librarian reported that a number of initiatives were underway to address user needs and elicit feedback. She reported that the library is working with the Directors of Teaching and Learning and the Directors of Research to support the development of teaching and research portfolios and that regular user feedback including that from students is sought through user groups as well as interaction with student representatives and individual students. Common issues of concern are identified and actions taken to resolve them. The Dean of Health Sciences welcomed the fact that efforts are made to identify recurrent themes and cited open access for Nursing students as an issue of on-going concern.

**XX** The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Committee for its input and agreed that identification of recurrent issues arising from user feedback is useful. With regard to the Legal Deposit review, she expressed concern that it had not been completed as yet, and it was agreed that the Quality Committee recommend to Council that a speedy resolution to this be sought as a matter of urgency.

**(ii) Implementation Plan for the School of Medicine**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Interim Head of School, Professor Paul Browne, and the School Administrator, Ms Orla Bannon to the meeting. Professor Browne reported that the Heads of Discipline had signed off on the Implementation Plan and that implementation of recommendations was on-going through key academic and administrative staff.

In relation to the Reviewers' recommendations concerning the structure of the School, Professor Browne reported that the existing structure will be retained but that some re-organisation would be considered in the context of the strategic and finance plan without impairing the workings of the disciplines. Addressing the Provost's recommendation concerning the relationship between the School and the Therapy disciplines, Professor Browne reported that there had been considerable progress in interfacing with the Therapies and that greater collaboration between Disciplines was now taking place. The Interim Head of School has met with the Director of Human Resources in relation to the

development and implementation of performance management systems, but the issue is complicated by the fact that the School has both College and Hospital employees. In relation to identifying opportunities for increasing philanthropic opportunities, the School liaises with the Trinity Foundation on a regular basis to develop philanthropic initiatives.

The Reviewers recommended initiating a review of the feasibility of the Trinity Translational Medical Institute (TTMI) and the Interim Head of School reported that he has met with the Dean of Research in this regard - a review is being progressed through the Quality Office.

The Interim Head of School updated the Committee on developments in relation to Trinity Health Ireland (THI) and reported that Mr Frank Dolphin had been appointed as the Chair of the Dublin Midlands Hospital Group. The development of THI will take account of the development of the hospital group and while TCD will be actively involved as the academic partner, much of the initial development is outside the scope of the School. A critical issue for THI will be the protection of academic time for key clinicians as there is no specific model for this.

The Reviewers' recommendation in relation to student evaluations is being addressed by the Director of Teaching and Learning Undergraduate. The School feels that the College policy to evaluate every module every year is not practical given the large number of modules in the school and the fact that some modules would require more time to evaluate than others. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer emphasised Council policy that all taught undergraduate modules must be evaluated every year, but that the School has discretion as to how this is done.

In relation to the review of the Therapies, the School Administrator reported that as these reviews had taken place prior to the review of the School, progress in implementing the recommendations was further along. One of the key actions arising from the Therapy reviews is that the Discipline Heads be members of the School Executive; this is in place and helping to ensure optimum involvement of the therapies with School-level issues.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Interim Head of School and the School Administrator for their input and opened the item for discussion. She noted that the lack of performance management systems (PMS) was a recurrent theme from quality reviews and that the recent quality review of Human Resources had also highlighted this. It was noted by a Committee member that the lack of performance management systems was also highlighted in the IRIU review and it is therefore important that the Committee engages with the issue. It was agreed that the systems in place in the US and UK can be counter-productive and that a system which incentivises additional research and supports performance would be preferred. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Committee for its input, noting that the development of a suitable PMS for an academic environment is a substantial piece of work and will need to be led by Human Resources as a core piece of the new HR strategy.

In relation to the presentation of the Implementation Plan, the Academic Secretary remarked that it was unclear from the wording in the report whether actions had been completed or were on-going, and whether the timeframes related to the calendar or the academic year. The Vice-Provost/Chief

Academic Officer concurred and suggested that greater consistency in terms of presentation would be useful. The Interim Head of School agreed to amend the Implementation Plan accordingly prior to circulation to Council.

With regard to the Reviewers' recommendations concerning staff mentoring, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer noted that there are a number of mentoring programmes already in place across College for new and existing academic staff and re-iterated the importance of ensuring that these initiatives were fully implemented in relation to new staff.

### **(iii) Progress report for School of Physics**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Head of School, Professor James Lunney, and the School Administrator, Dr Colm Stephens to the meeting and invited Professor Lunney to speak to the progress report that had been circulated with papers for the meeting.

The Head of School began by addressing the Reviewers' concerns regarding the Theoretical Physics course and reported that the course committee, previously suspended, had now been reconvened. As this is a high profile course, he emphasised the importance of ensuring that it is maintained and supported as a prestige offering by the College.

In relation to the appointment of a new Erasmus Smith's Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, Professor Lunney reported that the person appointed as the new Director of CRANN would also be offered the School Chair. Negotiations are on-going with the preferred candidate and Professor Lunney emphasised the need to resolve this as quickly as possible.

With reference to the Reviewers' recommendation to encourage innovation in teaching, the Head of School reported that the School is looking at ways of modernising its teaching methods, in particular to support how students gain a conceptual grasp of the principles of physics.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Head of School and invited comment from the Committee. The Committee discussed the Reviewers' recommendation that Theoretical Physics students should complete a more sizable research project and the Head of School reported that they hoped to offer a schedule of projects next year in conjunction with the School of Maths. The Physics Course management committee is currently overseeing a realignment of the courses to ensure that both sets of students complete a research portion. While the importance of being able to offer a research project as part of the taught course provision was agreed, it was acknowledged that diminishing resources in terms of staff numbers places additional strain on those tasked with supervising these projects, and can jeopardise quality overall. This will need to be addressed if College's strategy is to increase, even modestly, the number of undergraduate and postgraduate students. The Academic Secretary commented that the School has made significant progress in addressing the recommendations of the Reviewers in respect of teaching and learning, and stressed the importance of fully illustrating this in their progress report.

Professor Lunney concluded by remarking that although the Review report was more focussed on the School's teaching than research, the School is heavily involved in research at the interface with industry, which is very time consuming. Consequently the School doesn't have sufficient senior staff to undertake leadership and administrative roles, and the implications of this may not be fully appreciated at College level.

**(iv) Progress report for Treasurer's Office**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer welcomed the Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Mr Ian Mathews, to the meeting and invited him to speak to the progress report for the Treasurer's Office.

Mr Mathews began by reporting that the Treasurer's Office had made significant progress in addressing the Reviewers' recommendations. The new Financial Information System (FIS) went live on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013 with the roll-out of Phase 1, and it is envisaged that all three phases will be completed by the end of 2014. A new structure for the Division was approved by Board in June 2013 as part of the START programme (to include a name change to the Financial Services Division) and includes two new senior appointments – a Deputy Chief Financial Officer/Director of Financial Services and a Director of Financial Planning and Risk Management – who is expected to be in place by the end of Hilary Term 2014.

In relation to the Reviewers' recommendations concerning a support programme for the re-profiled CFO role, Mr Mathews reported that a programme of support and training was on-going and had been extended to the Senior Management Team. It includes site visits to peer universities such as Notre Dame and Oxford, where a new Oracle system has been put in place, participation in leadership training programmes and role-specific training in terms of strategic responsibilities.

The Reviewers highlighted issues of concern in relation to summary reporting on College finances. The CFO explained that more sophisticated reporting will be possible with the new FIS and that KPIs (sectoral and School-based) are being developed with the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer and the Provost. In relation to the issue of over-emphasis on compliance which was raised by the Reviewers, the CFO re-iterated the importance of ensuring that College is compliant with Board approved policies on travel, entertainment and hospitality, and reported that the new FIS will provide a platform to conduct business in a more efficient manner.

The Chief Financial Officer concluded by reporting that the transition to the new financial environment had required extensive consultation and engagement with the College community in terms of providing support and managing expectation and that this would be on-going through the full roll-out of the project. The next two years will see the bedding in of the new structures and the FIS project, and will require careful management of the change environment in order to ensure that the College community remains on-side.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Chief Financial Officer for his report and the discussion concluded.

## **QC/13-14/012**

### **(i) External Examiners**

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer invited the Academic Secretary to speak to a memo on the External examining process which had been circulated. The Academic Secretary reported that following the last meeting of the Quality Committee at which concerns were expressed as to whether the current policies and procedures are sufficiently well documented (QC/13-14/006), an initial examination of the External Examining process had been undertaken to identify areas that required improvement or streamlining. A full proposal will be brought to the Committee in due course.

In the discussion which followed the following issues were outlined:

- The relationship between this piece of work and the START project on External Examiner payment;
- The reputational damage that can be caused when External Examiners' reports are not submitted and there are delays in Examiner payments;
- The difficulty experienced by some members of staff in gaining access to External Examiner reports.

As part of the on-going work at Faculty level to manage revised quality processes locally, the Heads of School must report to the Faculty Deans on issues arising from the External Examiner reports and the Faculty Deans in turn must report to the Quality Committee. The mechanism for gathering this data at School and Faculty level is currently under development but by exercising this role, Heads of School and Faculty Deans will be able to identify and resolve common issues. Similarly the process will allow for the sharing of best practice. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Academic Secretary for her report and closed the discussion.

### **ii) Programmatic review**

The Academic Secretary reported that a pilot review of the TR071 programme would be undertaken in 2014 and that the exercise would be used to develop procedures and processes for programmatic review generally. She suggested that a small working group of the Quality Committee to oversee the development of procedures and guidelines for programmatic review be established, with membership including, among others, the Senior Lecturer and student representatives. In response to a query from the Acting Librarian, the Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer confirmed that the provision of Library services to students would be assessed as part of the review.

## **QC/13-14/013 Report from Faculties**

### **(i) Annual report on postgraduate module surveys**

The Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the Dean of Health Sciences spoke to reports on postgraduate course evaluations conducted by the Faculties for the academic year 2012/13. Two surveys were sent out, one evaluating the taught element of the course and the second the dissertation. The results of the surveys were sent to the Heads of School and the Directors of Postgraduate Teaching & Learning and the importance of closing the feedback loop with course co-ordinators and students was emphasised. A brief discussion ensued during which it was noted that where dissatisfaction levels for courses were high, the issues should be addressed with the relevant Directors of Teaching & Learning. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked the Deans for their reports and commented that the exercise was useful for identifying areas that required further action.

**(ii) Update on implementation of undergraduate module surveys**

In relation to the implementation of undergraduate module surveys, the Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) reported that half of all undergraduate modules taught in the Faculty of AHSS had been evaluated but that there were issues regarding the level of resources required to carry this function out. The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer reiterated the requirement that all taught undergraduate modules are evaluated every year and that the Dean needs to be able to report that this has been done. The Senior Lecturer noted that it had been agreed at the Quality Committee meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013 (QC/13-14/005) that while the survey method was at the discretion of the School, focus groups should not be used as the sole method of evaluation. He believed that this agreement was not helpful and requested that the original proposal by the Academic Secretary be revisited.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer suggested that given that the change from central to local module surveys was going to present challenges to the Schools and Faculties, that for this academic year Schools should be advised that they may conduct the module evaluations in a way that best suits the local circumstance and a review of the process be undertaken in September 2014.

The Senior Lecturer agreed with this approach and felt it would address some of the concerns expressed at the previous two Undergraduate Studies Committee meetings in relation to the practicality of implementing module surveys at relatively short notice and with limited resources. He also reported a perception that the data generated by module surveys would not 'go anywhere'.

The Vice-Provost/Chief Academic Officer thanked that Quality Committee for its input and agreed to issue a memo to the Schools on the revised process, and she undertook to liaise with Committee members on its content.

**QC/13-14/014 Any other business**

There was no other business and the meeting closed. The next meeting will take place on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014.